

Repair Café Case Study

Overview

Cardiff Met Repair Café, is a monthly recurring event that is held on each Campus, providing free repairs for things such as household items, clothes, electronics, jewellery, free bike servicing and security marking. We were the 1st University in Wales to set-up as a Repair Café back in September 2019.

Attendance

The event is opened for anybody to attend (staff, students and local community) and is also advertised as part of the Repair Café Wales Community. The event is managed by the Sustainability Team of two and a team of volunteer repairers, tinkerers and meet and greeters (staff, students and local community members). Although some of our volunteers are experts, many are simply people who like fixing and tinkering. Others aren't practical at all, but organise, help with meet & greet, general queries, form administration, queue management and tea & coffee. You can book to attend (as this provides a useful reminder) or just rock up. In terms of event planning, it can prove to be the unknown – not knowing who or how many will show up and what they could possibly bring and can at times be very weather dependant! For visibility and ease of access we have a purpose built large wooden pergola to house the event in the middle of Llandaff Campus. When you arrive with an item for repair, a volunteer host asks you to complete a repair form. The items brought are tracked and the information is used for the Repair Café Wales community in general and to understand items that have the same consistent issues and allows Repair Café Wales to take the information back to the manufacturer to force improvements.



Operation

Each month, the repair volunteers fix things that would otherwise be thrown away. In doing so, they repair for free, help save the environment, share skills with people that need things fixed, and meet like-minded people. Initial contact is made with Students during Freshers Welcome Week. In September 2023, 372 student flats attended the Free Repair Café at their Halls with 1536 items pat tested for free and 26 bikes serviced in two days. This then signposts them to all the planned Repair Cafes during their first term.

Challenges

There have been challenges in ensuring the longevity of the initiative, as it relies on volunteers. Without the volunteers there are no repairs and without the attendees there are few repairs – it's about effective word of mouth and promotion of the feel-good stories that are paramount to the events success. Through collaboration with Cardiff Cycle Workshop, staff, students, community and Cardiff Met Award (SU's employability Award) our Repair Café has managed to sustain event by event its operation – growing in numbers of attendees, items and volunteers.

Changing the narrative

The event which initially started as a way of teaching new skills and helping with prolonging the life of items, has turned into a great opportunity to raise awareness and change the narrative on sustainability by highlighting stories from the communities and what the repairs mean to them and the good it can do in society.



By capturing these heartfelt stories behind the items being repaired and posting them on social media, Cardiff Met Sustainability has helped to shape a different narrative on the culture of consumption. It has encouraged people to care and develop memories with their items rather than replacing them with something new. In 2023, we've created and posted a total of 11 videos for Repair Café, which accumulated a total of 14,454 views on Instagram. The Repair Café success on Campus and capturing the heartfelt stories behind items being repaired has also attracted local organisations looking to promote an example of best practice and circular economy culture. BBC Cymru came to interview participants during the Repair Café of Green Week 2024, and Climate Action Wales (Welsh Govt.) also reached out to come and take promotional materials of our activities. Their promotional materials have attracted a lot of attention to our online channels and have helped us raise awareness on the importance of repairs and helped with actively engaging the public in

sustainability. This event also contributes to Cardiff Met's greater purpose in today's society: to benefit the lives of individuals with volunteering opportunities; communities, and wider society by assisting with the cost-of-living crisis; facilitating education and skills sharing and reducing carbon emissions by extending the life of items. We support a local not-for-profit organisation, by paying them to provide our Bike Servicing but also signposting their workshop near our Campus to buy a fully serviced, second hand bike. We also donate back to them any abandoned bikes at the end of each academic year for refurbishment and to be sold to the public / new students. The events are marketed internally on staff & student platforms, via social media, Eventbrite, University website and Repair Café Wales website. The University has committed to providing this event for the next three years.

Repair Café data by academic year	<u>19/20</u>	<u>21/22</u>	<u>22/23</u>	<u>23/24</u>	
Number of events held	10	11	13	13 *	* 4 events planned for Summer
Items Fixed	262	215	251	1846	
Items Brought	334	228	263	1870	
Average % repaired	79.7%	97.74%	88.17%	85.12%	
% fixed	78.44%	94.30%	95.43%	98.72%	
Staff attendees	174	87	73	112	
Student attendees	101	83	169	527	
Public attendees	59	58	21	68	
Bike repairs	117	127	207	196	

We also analyse attendees, by staff, student and public as it's a community event on Campus. This academic year so far, 707 people have brought items to the event with another four events still to go. Data recorded over the 4 academic years shows that through this event, more than 2500 items have been repaired for free with 1532 attendees. The numbers attending are increasing in each category, the percentage of items fixed and increase in the number of events.

Funding

Although the monthly running of the Repair Café relies on volunteer skill sharing, the establishment of the Repair Café received vital support from the Sustainability Team, which contribute funds for the procurement of repair equipment, a suggested toolkit, banner stand, donation boxes and repair supplies e.g. electronics and sewing. Furthermore, the University extends its support each month by providing complimentary tea, coffee and snacks throughout the duration of the event. As an enriching addition to the event, the University covers the monthly costs of bike mechanics who offer free bike servicing for staff, students, and the public. This multi-faceted support underscores the University's commitment to fostering sustainability and community well-being and a dedication to the circular economy ethos through extending the life of items that would otherwise end up in landfill. By offering free repairs, the event addresses the cost-of-living crisis while promoting skill sharing and fostering a warm and welcoming community atmosphere. The joy of attendees, the opportunity to watch and observe good news stories is truly palpable. The Repair Café, provides a platform to meet new people and for society to embrace the art of repairs, normalising it through engaging social media stories, e.g. capturing the heartfelt stories behind the items brought in for repair, encourages individuals to cherish their belongings in an era dominated by disposable consumer culture. Witnessing tears of joy and profound connections sparked by repaired items underscores the deeper significance of this endeavour, catalysing a positive shift in attitudes toward repair over replacement. A lot of public attendees are retired community members who no longer have the tools or ability to be able to repair something they may have been able to do a few years ago. They are aware what and how it needs fixing and it's a really nice experience to hear the conversations with the repairers and attendees. The attendees sit around with their tea and coffee watching and chatting with the repairers.



By providing free bike servicing and repairs at the event, staff, students, and wider community have been empowered and encouraged to take more bike trips. Almost 200 bikes are serviced for free annually, reducing pollution around Cardiff, and offering a sense of a safe, cycle to & from campus. To compliment the free bike servicing, SW Police attend offering free security marking for the bikes and discussing about safety and neighbourhood alerts. Most importantly, the repair café doesn't only fix the items for people, it helps learn new skills. Attendees are invited to watch how their item is being repaired,

encouraged to ask questions to learn how to potentially fix it again in the future. Each year, over all attendees are offered the opportunity to learn basic repairs such as basic sewing, checking of their tyres and brakes etc.

The monthly run sessions of Repair Café turned into a great hub of connection which benefits other areas of the University. Through in person conversations, staff and students were signposted to other opportunities of sustainability at the university such as Sustainability Social Club, Community Day or monthly litter picks. The event represents a great opportunity for networking, where attendees are able to meet new people and make connections for on Campus and in the Community.

The data collected on the bike repairs and number of people cycling has informed Cardiff Met's Travel Plan. By providing free bike servicing people felt safer on the roads and more empowered to choose a sustainable form of transport to get to and from Campus. Attendees found out more information about new cycling routes, cycling facilities on campus, reducing anxiety, and helping them build new habits with ease. The event also gathered a lot of interest from people wanting to further their newly learn skills (such as sewing and mending) The University's School of Art and Design launched in 2024 a range of new evening / weekend short courses open to all abilities, giving people the opportunity to hone their skills at the University's professionally equipped studios and workspaces.